

O 071718Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8128

UNCLAS TBILISI 002774

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CARC, EUR/RUS, EUR FO, DS/ITA/EUR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV ASEC GG RU

SUBJECT: TBILISI PROTESTS: SITREP 3

REF: TBILISI 2771

PRESIDENT SAAKASHVILI ADDRESSES THE GEORGIAN NATION

¶1. President Saakashvili addressed the Georgian nation live on television at approximately 1900 on November 7. Meanwhile, demonstrators clashed in the streets with police after being dispersed from the Rike area on the other side of the Mtkvari River from Parliament. The demonstrators had retreated to this area after being forced off Rustaveli Avenue in front of the Parliament earlier in the day. Television cameras captured hundreds of demonstrators being fired on with a water cannon, tear gas and reportedly, rubber bullets. Also filmed were demonstrators being beaten by police and a few policemen being beaten by demonstrators. Unconfirmed reports place the number of emergency room admissions at 360, although the extent of the injuries treated is not known.

¶2. Saakashvili's speech offered no conciliation with the demonstrators. He said that the government had allowed the protests to continue so long as they were peaceful, and that the protesters were exercising their democratic rights until today. The government had taken the opportunity to re-open Rustaveli Avenue early on November 7 when few protesters remained. The violence began only because protesters tried to return to the street. Saakashvili said only such force as is usual in other democratic states was used.

¶3. The bulk of Saakashvili's speech was focused on clandestine Russian support for the disorders. He said that Georgian intelligence was aware of Russian plans to create turmoil in Georgia, and that an alternative government has already been set up in Moscow. He described Badri Patarkatsishvili as a "Russian" oligarch who has called for overthrowing the government. He referred to co-optation by Russian intelligence of some other opposition leaders. Immediately after the speech ended pro-government Rustavi 2 began airing video and telephone conversations of some leaders allegedly communicating with Russian intelligence agents. Saakashvili added that some Russian diplomats are being expelled as undesirable persons.

¶4. Saakashvili vowed not to allow the protests to de-stabilize Georgia or jeopardize Georgia's future and economic and democratic progress, about which he expressed pride. He also said the disorder risks Georgia's chance to recover Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He briefly mentioned the need for dialogue and respect for democratic processes, and then asked the demonstrators in the street to disperse and go home. He called on the population to support him in this, relying on their wisdom and patriotism.

¶5. Saakashvili's speech, although more impassioned than his last appearance on Sunday, did not address the election-related demands that have been continuously voiced by the opposition. It offered no compromise to the protesters who still are present on many streets in the capital, and warned that all appropriate measures will be taken to restore order.

¶6. Protests and sporadic clashes with police might continue through the night. because Saakashvili's words are unlikely

to persuade the hard core of demonstrators to leave the streets. His words were addressed to the wider public watching on television and strongly rely on the Russian threat to bring people to his side in his contest with the opposition.

ANTI-GOVERNMENT TELEVISION STATION CLOSED DOWN

17. At about 2100, the Embassy received reports that police had entered the studios of Imedi television, which is regarded as anti-government. The station then went off the air. Government officials reportedly justified the action by blaming the station for inciting the anti-government violence that went on today.

TEFFT